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Parkman Center For Urban Affairs

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Young Professionals and City Neighborhoods

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As part of its continuing work on the evolution of city neighborhoods, the Parkman Center has studied patterns of middle class resettlement in the urban core. A recent Parkman House conference brought together a group of young professional newcomers to discuss the reasons for their choice and their feelings about city life. Soon afterward, Parkman Center staff visited a number of other cities to supplement findings in Boston.

The following report is an effort to present issues that emerge from this new migration and to encourage discussion about a trend of apparently increasing significance. Emphasis here falls on Boston, but in its essentials the report should be relevant to developments in several American cities. Numerically the new migrants may be few; in what they may portend for a potentially much greater shift in locational preference, they deserve notice from a national perspective.

The New Migrants

Long-time residents of older urban neighborhoods are sometimes annoyed to hear that their communities have been "discovered" by young professional newcomers. The fact is, however, that such people — whether they are architects, planners, professors, journalists or whatever else — in a sense can claim to be discoverers, since what is new to them often has a way of seeming new to society at large.

They are sometimes called "trendies." It is not a bad tag. With generous options in where and how they live, with an edge in their ability to communicate tastes and values, they can influence public perceptions of what is desirable simply by talking to one another — and thus in the course of time to the media.

If a "rediscover the city" movement is to amount to much, an adventurous middle class subset of the baby boom generation will be on its leading edge. There are several reasons for this. One is that a tolerance toward or even a desire for a degree of cultural and racial heterogeneity seems most marked among this group. Another reason is that, as trend-setters, such people are alert to city options (a new interest in old houses, for instance), while the bulk of society remains fixed on a suburban ideal. Still another reason is that with relatively high earning power, they can find ways to "live around" such urban difficulties as poor public education; and if they cannot, they have the means to leave them behind rather quickly.

They are much more important in the long run than older and very affluent returnees from the suburbs who will gravitate toward fortress condominiums and luxury rental towers. Young

professional urban settlers are more important because of the large household-forming peer group on whom they will exercise a taste-making influence.

Individual cities and metropolitan areas have been conscious of the young professional phenomenon occurring within their own boundaries, in some cases for a decade or more. A national awareness of the phenomenon, however, and its possible consequences for urban evolution, is just developing. That awareness will grow as more instances are noticed. Just a few examples of established or emerging settlements in older cities are Trenton Place in Wilmington, Society Hill in Philadelphia, South Baltimore and Charles Village in Baltimore, Mt. Adams, as well as parts of Hyde Park

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and Mt. Auburn in Cincinnati, the Central West End and Lafayette Square in St. Louis, Hyde Park in Chicago, Noe Valley in San Francisco, and even a formerly run-down rooming house area of old German mansions in San Antonio.

In Boston, young middle class immigrants no longer live just on Beacon Hill and in the Back Bay (where they are no novelty), or even in Charlestown and the South End, but now also in the 19th century streetcar suburbs of Dorchester and Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury. Several of these neighborhoods, or parts of them, once had but largely lost a professional presence. That presence is now reappearing as a more broadly defined professional class "reclaims" areas of past gentility.

The term "young professional" is obviously imprecise. Neither it nor "intellectual" — a term also used — will do at all for the purposes of a social taxonomy. The possible quibbles over who is or is not a young professional are infinite. However, one can point with confidence to an emerging group whose class characteristics are quite distinguishable, in gross, from those of the majority of their urban neighbors.

While the people at issue have respectable to quite impressive incomes for the most part, income by itself is not the final test of their identity. Many blue-collar workers do as well. While higher education is a common feature, and while values, tastes and attitudes attributable to prolonged schooling are often conspicuous, a college degree is not the invariable sign. Nevertheless, superior income and education combine to help identify the type.

Although there are exceptions, many of the young professionals are indeed young — that is to say in their twenties and thirties — for the obvious and extremely significant reason that they are a part of the population bulge moving through the age profile of American society.

The great majority are white, with their black counterparts more apt to be migrating toward the suburbs. This appears to be true even in cities with a substantial older black middle class. Single-member households are common, often as a result of separation and divorce. For that matter, the trend toward episodic marriage may be an increasingly important factor as a second or third round of mate selection draws the newly single toward a pool of the unattached. Also common are childless couples, couples with young children, and homosexuals. Homosexuals, it has been observed, may play a part in the "regentrification" of declining urban areas well out of proportion to their numbers.

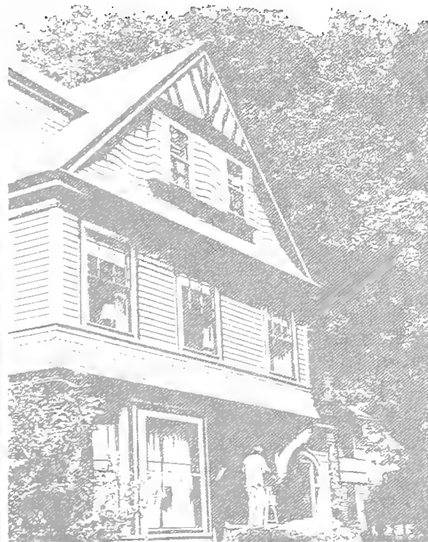
It is frequently the case that young professional migrants have come from outside the city, the state or even the region where they are presently living, and the experience of living in a variety of places is a common part of their life histories. Particularly common is prior urban experience, often during college or graduate school years.

How are young professional city dwellers different from suburbanites like them in education, occupation and income? "We're more interesting," said a young St. Louis woman, quite simply. Or again, "I'd say we were more concerned about intellectual things," remarked a woman in Boston's Back Bay. "We want to have seen the latest films. We want to know what people are reading."

A homeowner in a part of the city still marked by a good deal of blight pre-

sented it another way. "I don't go to the movies. I don't even read books much. I work on my house. As for people in the suburbs, I don't know many of them, but probably the difference between us is that I don't care about joining country clubs or things like that. I don't like to feel that I *have* to do anything to claim some kind of status."

"Why didn't I move to the suburbs?" A former New Yorker considered the question. "I don't know. For me, there is more freedom in the variety of the city. I *want* a racially and socially mixed neighborhood. It's the way I think this country has to go. To put it another way, I don't want to live with a collection of people who are just like I am professionally and socially. The friends I have tend to share those feelings."



A woman from Jamaica Plain emphasized escaping from the conventional. "We wanted a house that wasn't like anybody else's house, that wouldn't be Levittown. It could have turned out to be an apartment over a store on Centre Street."

This might be seen as a way of asserting status by denying it, at least according to customary tokens. Somewhat in the same vein is the pleasure new city dwellers get out of having suburban friends hesitate about visiting "the city."

Whether the young professional emphasizes intellect ("the latest films"), or living style (bare brick, butcher block and hanging plants, for instance), or a Thoreauesque standing apart from convention, there are very often feelings of superiority toward his or her suburban counterparts. In this sense, at least for the duration of their time in the core city, young professionals identify themselves as part of an elite within the middle class elite.

Such feelings, at times ambivalent, were expressed by the participants at the Parkman conference. The participants, both couples and single-member households, came from the South End, Roxbury, Dorchester and Jamaica Plain. Among them were an architect, two planners, an anthropologist, a child psychologist, a court officer, a crafts person, an environmentalist, an electrical engineer, and a graduate student working on a combined business and law degree. In age, they ranged from the early twenties through the late thirties. In length of residence, they had lived in their present neighborhoods from two months to seven years. Only two had been born in the Boston area (and had left it for a time), while more than half had come from outside the New England region. With one exception, all were homeowners.*

The first question discussed among them was the deceptively simple one, "Why do you live where you do?" Their answers follow some general observations about the new appeal of urban neighborhoods.

Choosing the City

What is it that draws a fraction of the young professional class into the urban core, or holds it there? A certain avant-gardism has been noted. They are people who are self-rewarded by doing that which is not perfectly typical in terms of their education and income. They can be quite pleased when other people seem incredulous about where they have freely chosen to dwell.

Beyond that, they are drawn very often by the character, quality and often relatively low price of housing. Their taste for "interesting" old houses has already given a new lease on life to a good many thousand examples of 19th century domestic architecture. And while quality is a premium value, even undistinguished stock can be made to serve, if there are compensating features. In the Mt. Adams section of Cincinnati, for instance, which overlooks the Ohio River Valley, quite inferior turn-of-the-century worker housing has been gutted and expensively redone with hardwood floors, sliding glass doors, skylights and balconies, either for upper income ownership or luxury rental.

Convenience to jobs and to cultural resources — particularly in cities like Boston, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago — is another priority item. Two working members of a household, especially without children, respond sometimes to an overwhelming logic when they look for a near-in location. Yet another reason, akin to the unsuburban or anti-suburban self-image mentioned above, is the allure of people like themselves who have opted for urban neighborhood living. The magnetic effect of urban chic, which needs to be looked at on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, is the overriding factor which carries middle class resettlement toward a point of critical mass.

In the Parkman Center conference, personal circumstances were naturally stressed. Even for those who had gone about the business of choosing a home most rationally, there was an element of impulse in the final decision. And for several, their locational choices coincided with major life changes — a new child or a new job or breaking out of a university orbit, for instance.

A young woman who looked at thirty houses in other communities before choosing Dorchester (the first house she and her husband saw there) downplayed any commitment to the city as opposed to the suburbs. Their mental map of the world was drawn along transportation lines.

"No, I didn't think in terms of strengthening the core city by moving in. There was some sense of responsibility to the city, but it was very much at a second level. Maybe it's because I went to a very political college — we both went to Antioch — and I've gotten *sick* of political stuff. I was just inundated with it. I went through all the flower child business, and now having a house and a little bit of land to make something beautiful in terms of my emotional life is really what I'm looking for."

*The group specifically did not include persons of comparable age, income and occupation who grew up in Boston and have opted to stay in the city. While they share much with the conference participants, they also tend to be notably different, as for instance in their awareness of "secret" housing markets, their settlement patterns, and their attitudes toward local institutions. Some notes on this group are contained in an earlier unpublished Parkman report.

The compelling attraction for her was one which might hardly occur to a New Englander — hardwood floors and bannisters. "You don't know what that means to someone from California. All that beautiful wood. I just fell in love with it."

For this Californian, a bargain price, architectural features and access to transportation ranked high in the making of the final quick decision. The existence of nearby stores came as a later pleasant surprise, while the neighborhood was generally perceived as a neutral environment, with a few problems. The bad image of the area shared by many long-time residents as well as suburbanites clearly had little influence on this couple. As her husband said, "There's minor crime around, but that's everywhere. We expected it." And about negative images conveyed by television, he responded with a laugh. "We don't have a television set."

The house itself, along with affordability, appeared to predominate as the basis for the majority of participants' decision to live where they do. The person most explicit in this regard had had a considerable experience of "urban pioneering" in Boston. He and his wife had first renovated a house as non-owners in East Boston and had moved on, both to turn their sweat into equity and to escape some unpleasant cultural conflicts. ("The first day we were there, a little kid came up and told us he was going to slash our tires.") They subsequently spent several years fixing up a house in the South End.

"This Jamaica Plain house is our third in Boston. I'm very into houses, the physical house. I looked all over Brookline at physical houses, and if you're into physical houses, what you look at in Brookline is a $100,000 investment. So finally I discovered this little jewel, the oldest house on its street."

Beyond a quick inspection to establish a sense of compatibility, the neighborhood did not appear to weigh as heavily as one might have expected at the outset. However, neighborhood characteristics did emerge as a factor in the likelihood of the participants' staying on.

Self-perceptions were one way in which the match between neighborhood and newcomer were expressed. As a wife who had reluctantly moved (at her husband's insistence) from Cambridge to Jamaica Plain recalled, "It was traumatic. I came kicking and screaming. I never realized that where I lived was so important to me, had so much to do with my self-image. I think I'm like a lot of people — that although I wouldn't have said I was like that, what is familiar to me is safe and that's where I'm comfortable and happy."

In an interesting way, this young woman's feelings became one of the nodes of the evening. Admitting that she had resisted the move and was now trying hard to adapt to it, her very open expression of the need for a "fit" between herself and her surroundings hinted at a key issue for everyone.

In what was perhaps the nearest to an ideological statement, a young Roxbury homeowner remarked that a part of his decision (only a part) was his desire to promote the development of a black professional enclave in Boston. "In my view the future of Roxbury as a black community depends on black professionals moving in."

Yet the evening helped to show that all of these decisions need to be viewed in terms of individual and household life cycles and that, as most of the participants would agree, what might be true of their feelings about where they live this year might not be true a year or five years from now.

The Contingency of Choice

From the very first remarks, it became evident that city living (or living in this city as opposed to some other) was very much a contingent situation for all the participants.

A young working mother conveyed the attitude and the effects it has over time. "We used to be in the South End. We'd never made any long-term plans, but it became clear when our child started crawling that we could no longer live there, and a lot of things that had always bothered us began to peak. Just visually it got on our nerves — abandoned storefronts and so on. So I think a lot of things we had been fairly comfortable with that hadn't caught up with us as any great anxiety, just one day made us decide we didn't want to put up with them anymore . . . . So we moved to Jamaica Plain and the two things that still concern me are, one, the school situation and, two, I feel the area is unstable. In our neighborhood, for instance, nothing particular is happening, but there seem to be a lot of houses for sale. I just don't know about staying in Boston if the neighborhood gets tough to live in. I'll lobby for moving if it does, but if it doesn't, I can also see staying here for a long time. I feel as though I am waiting to see what will happen."

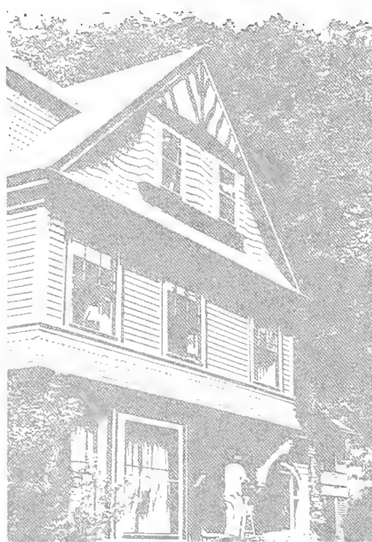
The phenomenon of living with people or in situations that appear to be no bother and then suddenly become an intense bother is an experience familiar to everyone. Job-changing, mate-changing, house-changing are often enough the result of such long accumulated and abruptly perceived shifts in taste, tolerance, and so on.

What seems notable, however, in the present context, is the facility with which the young professional can make those changes in regard to where he or she lives and in regard to the number of other options which may suddenly become both attractive and feasible. Whether the woman is right or wrong about turnover rates and "stability" may be much less important than the ease with which she and her family will make its future housing decisions.

Another perspective came from the Roxbury homeowner. He felt himself comfortably settled and had persuaded relatives to buy adjoining row houses ("to protect my investment"). Nevertheless, he acknowledged that in spite of his wish to see a new black middle class establish itself in the city, he could imagine himself leaving if he felt that he was simply playing the role of a loner, or if his wife's anxieties became too great, or if education became too much of a problem as his young daughter reached school age.

"The dilemma we face is how do you get other people to take the same step we did. Nobody wants to be Jackie Robinson. It's not worth it."

In a follow-up discussion, he speculated that he and his family would probably move to other places eventually in any case, and that from all points of view, it was probably most



reasonable to think of young professionals as having a time span of perhaps five years — the years without children or with very young children — when an urban setting may be particularly convenient and attractive.

This is a note which needs to be expanded upon, but in the meantime it should be said that an attitude of "hedged bets" seemed to prevail across the spectrum of conference participants. This was true regardless of age, enthusiasm, tenure in the city, or whatever else. The point to be emphasized is that everyone in the room had the option to live elsewhere (other parts of the metropolitan area or other parts of the country) and the experience of mobility to make that an easy thing to do.

Lacking ideological or philosophical commitments to the city (and these may be the least desirable of impulses to encourage), the kind of younger households in question are constantly going to be totaling up the pluses and minuses of their living situations. So may everyone, but here we are considering the most mobile members of a generally mobile society, capable of disassembling and reassembling their personal "community" with relatively little regard for place.

"Community" is an important and too little analyzed concept that needs to be examined in connection with the mounting interest in core city neighborhoods. The young professional is a fascinating instance since, on one hand, he or she may particularly *want* to establish "community" in terms of a traditional "neighborhood" and a "lived-in" house; yet on the other hand, and even when feeling most attached, may put down fairly shallow roots.

To put it another way, people who tend to behave in ways counter to prevailing taste and expectation are liable either to continue to turn up new living arrangements or are liable to settle into more conventional streams of social behavior as they age. This is to say, simply, that a constellation of factors which might make a row house neighborhood or a neighborhood of mini-Victorian mansions highly desirable at one point in time might make a quite different situation (and idea of "community") just as desirable at a slightly later point in time.

People with large options, relative affluence, wide experiences could be made to look like the spoiled children of our society. They want so many things, they may even want contradictory things, and more than the mass of people, they may well get them — serially if not all at once.

A young South Ender said of her neighborhood, "I like it very much. My husband's had it and wants to get out, so we're in the process of deciding." But she quite frankly described at a later point what a mix of features they ideally wanted: convenience to the heart of the city, a heterogeneous society, open space and woods, well-kept parks, "like the kind you see in Berlin."

It would not be at all inappropriate to suggest that given this kind of yearning for so much, the choice of a city neighborhood can have a good deal of nostalgia about it and may, perhaps only briefly, correspond to a very elusive notion of "the good life."

Passages

The sampling of young professionals gathered at the Parkman House provided a vivid glimpse of individuals and households transiting their life cycles. More than that, one had a sense throughout the Parkman evening of personal evolution, demographic and "lifestyle" evolution and the evolution of the city going on together, passing in and out of phase.

In these terms, the choice of a city neighborhood clearly did not represent any kind of a final decision, but rather one decision in a lifetime of choosing where and how to live. As one said, "I think the time horizon is important. If you feel you can sell at a reasonable price in a reasonable time, maybe you don't go much beyond the physical house, but maybe when school becomes important, you begin to rethink the future." Or another: "Children complicate your decisions enormously."

A couple phrased their possible departure from their neighborhood (and the region) simply in terms of growing older. "If anything, I'd say our neighborhood is improving, but we're in our late thirties, we've been struggling for a long time to make the city do what it's supposed to do — to make the policemen police and the building inspectors inspect. And, you know, when parents get older and die, when even some of your friends begin to die, your resilience goes a little. You get worn down."

A lesson to be drawn from the quite obvious fact that young professionals, as much or more than any other population group, will be in a continual process of household formation or dissolution, job-changing and taste-changing — all with consequences for where

they dwell — is that replacement trends rather than individual decisions are the thing to look for. That a few young professional households discover some forgotten trove of row houses or 19th century cottages may indicate relatively little for the future of the area if — in their passage — they are not followed by others like them. Are so-called "pioneers" succeeded by "colonists"? Have new real estate actors come on the scene? Has media treatment changed and begun to stamp a fresh image on the neighborhood? Has a sub-neighborhood even acquired a new name? These count for much more, in terms of neighborhood evolution, than any few individual decisions.

Problems of Urban Living

Among the negative aspects of city residence most talked about during the evening, these predominated, roughly in order of the time given to them: security of persons and property; the quality of public education and, more generally, the responsiveness of the city and other public institutions; and finally, the "civility" of Boston as a place to live.

The question of safety was a curious mix of conflicting feelings and assessments. On one hand, almost everyone expressed nervous humor about the experienced or potential dangers of the city. "I feel safe walking at night in the South End," one woman said, "maybe I shouldn't." And another described herself as "perhaps the product of reading in the newspaper that I'm supposed to be afraid."

One participant recalled that a local storekeeper was shot the day he moved in, and several remarked that older residents welcomed them by telling about the latest crimes on the block. Yet mixed into the conversation were vigorous reassurances.

At least four people mentioned that when they first stopped to look at their prospective homes, the police appeared, called by watchful neighbors. It was also noted as a positive feature that people in many areas really do seem to look after one another's homes. "There's a wonderful spirit of mutual protectiveness. I certainly don't find it in the wealthy suburb where my parents live," said one.

What emerged here were views that oddly co-exist with one another. One set of attitudes seems to be that the city is an adventure and that in taking certain risks, or at least living with them, one is more in touch with reality than people in the suburbs. (The suburbs, incidentally, were often described as being *less* safe than we are told.)

Another set of attitudes, often expressed by the same people, goes something like this: "The city is actually much *more* safe than presumed and (knock wood) we personally haven't had any trouble because of protective neighbors, good luck, etc."

In any case, it seemed clear that physical and household integrity were of paramount concern. Yet as the evening went on, this concern evolved into a considerably more general preoccupation with unpleasant human contacts and even non-personally directed acts of incivility.

In fact, reviewing the record of the evening, physical attack was only the most threatening (and not the most obsessive) end of a spectrum that shaded into abusive kids on a tennis court, smashed beer bottles, belligerent drivers, venal public officials, an ill-kept environment — in sum, all the "ungracious" aspects of city life. As one person put it, "Sometimes, when you've come home from Lexington — and believe me, I don't want to live in Lexington — you just wish, for once, you'd look down and the streets would be *clean.*"

Challenges and Hassles

During the course of the evening, a participant-observer made a distinction which seems to be a useful one. What he heard around him were two kinds of complaints — quite apart from the positive claims people were making for their housing choices and their neighborhoods.

One kind of complaint seemed almost like an expression of pride in challenges successfully met. Heating a large old house with a wood-burning stove was a feat one could boast about. Carrying out repairs on a house beyond its economic life (according to the appraisal handbook) was a feat one could boast about.

But there are other things in the environment — they could be called "hassles" — that wear people down. (And young professionals are by no means alone in feeling the effects of such difficulties.) All of the hassles discussed at the meeting clumped around the quality of life in the region and particularly focused on Boston as an epitome of the performance (or non-performance) of public institutions, at all levels.

Although none of the participants had children in the public schools, the public school system was frequently offered as *the* outstanding instance of an alienating failure in both the public sector and the society it mirrors. As one resident put it: "There is no question, in my mind, that the schools of Boston are the schools most people of Boston want to have. And that really makes me feel out of place. You wouldn't have an elected School Committee with the characters who sit on that committee if it weren't for the voters. It indicates, I think, that here there are broad differences of interest between newcomers such as ourselves and the resident population."

"I'm sorry," he went on, "but the fact remains that the schools in this town are an unbelievable scandal. I don't care how you measure it. Five times as much central administration as other cities, for instance. Finally you say, 'I can't live with that kind of incompetence.' It's been twelve years now for us in Boston — seven in a neighborhood we love and admire — but now we'd like to try living in another city, another part of the country where people have higher expectations of one another."

Another person turned the criticism back on the young professionals themselves. "To me it indicates that we are not demanding enough. Frankly I think it's debilitating to have somebody send their kid to a bad school to make a point of principle when the issue is demanding more and getting it. For instance in Newton," he continued, "one of the things is people have no qualms about their dealings with that system. God damn it, they pay a lot of money for it and they're not going to let it rip them off. We don't have that attitude. We have the attitude, 'Oh, is it right, is it wrong? Are we good, are we bad?' And the issue about what happens in the schools doesn't really get raised by people like us. I think it's all a direct result — and this is what makes Boston so different from Houston — of the fact that so many of us are in government and education and these other tertiary (or worse) industries. It makes us too soft, too undemanding, not nearly self-interested or 'hedonistic' enough. It's the handicap of being a liberal."

When asked whether it bothered her not to have her children in the system and by that means to exert pressure on it, a mother admitted that of course it bothered her. "But you only have so many hours to fight so many battles, and while you are fighting the educational system, your kids will be going through it."

At the same time, she pointed out that she did not envy suburban friends, even with their access to presumably better suburban schools. "We truly do feel our kids, living in the city, have had things that suburban kids don't have."

It should be added that while not present at the session, there are other young professional parents who have vehemently committed themselves and their children to the public schools (at least at the elementary level). Differences in the quality of the particular schools concerned may be a factor, but so may be the factor of "critical mass" which makes a group of parents feel that they have sufficient numbers or influence to alter a school environment.

Public education was only one example of a syndrome of unresponsiveness and inefficiency that a number of participants cited as negatively influencing their feelings and their long-term prospects. Without doubt the quality of public institutions is a differential affecting the competitive attraction of various cities. A Dorchester resident who expressed himself as quite happy with his home and his neighborhood was quite candid in this regard.

"Government generally here, for an outsider like myself, is just incomprehensible. My sense of outrage may be because it is all so new and sudden, but it is a constraint on a commitment to Boston as a permanent home. The nature of government — its unresponsiveness, the lack of professionalism I see in it — makes me rethink the future."

The Jamaica Plain architect restated the problem in terms of regional attitudes, the regional economy, and the opportunities open to professionals in that economy.

"Right now, for someone like myself, the possibility of growing here is small, and also life is difficult in the Northeast. It's a problem that Boston is going to have to face at some time — life here is simply more difficult than it needs to be. I experience it in trying to get things done with our local bureaucracies, but the issue is larger than that."

At this point the moderator broke in with a thought of his own. It seemed to him, he said, that some of the appeal of Boston and the New England region is akin to the appeal that old England has for a certain kind of foreigner. England sometimes can charm exactly because it muddles along, because it can be so ludicrously inefficient and at the same time quaint. As another participant remarked, "This city is so much more humane than Washington, where I used to live. I think I'll take my funny little Boston."

In that remark she may have begun to capture the answer to a question posed later on by an expert on population studies. "There are so many negatives you can point to," he said, "like taxes, an eroding economic base, the weather — and yet it doesn't add up. More people want to live here than, by rights, ought to want to live here."

There was some agreement that Boston's attractions and irritations are related. The young woman from California praised public services in the West as being far superior, but preferred Boston as an older city with a human scale that a pedestrian can love. Others admitted that even while Boston's political folkways might be deplorable, they also made a wonderful "theatre of the absurd."

"There is one politician here — I won't mention his name," a participant remarked, "who used to make my skin crawl. Absolutely crawl. Now I get a kick out of him. That's a terrible thing to say, but it's true."

Affinity and Proprietorship

As noted earlier, the discussion of "hassles" went through an interesting evolution in the course of the evening. Hassles — defined as problems which young professional residents view as seriously undermining their commitment to the city — began with personal safety, enlarged to include the unresponsiveness of public institutions, enlarged even beyond that to address the economic and psychological climate of the region, and then settled on the theme of civility.

At times there was almost a plaintiveness about this subject. The group clearly felt itself composed of people who do no harm to others and wish others would behave with the same kind of decorum. The remark, "if just once in a while you could look down and see the streets *clean*," expressed the modesty of what they were asking for.

On the face of it, this and similar requests do not seem excessive. Intelligent and honest politics, competent public services, an unlittered, unabused cityscape, and decent neighbors appear to be no more than what a reasonable person should expect.

One might reply that it is and it isn't.

In the context of city neighborhoods, in the larger political and social climate of this and other cities, complaints and demands of the sort heard at the Parkman conference inevitably take on class connotations. To put it another way, values which collectively define the more affluent suburbs tend to become latent with challenge when they locate in the often socially foreign territory of urban neighborhoods.

In Boston's South End such conflict has been easily observable for years, though it often goes by other names. In other neighborhoods, the conflict may or may not emerge so sharply. Nevertheless, class differences and all that such differences can imply in terms of acceptable street behavior, child-rearing practices, politics, religion, and even cooking smells are probably the fundamental issue in a "back to the city" movement — wherever it takes place.

Interestingly, class differences are often a more taboo subject than race. An example during the Parkman evening was a situation described by a Jamaica Plain woman. An enthusiastic tennis player, she had been very pleased when the city built a set of courts near her home, until she discovered how difficult it could be to use them.

"There is a certain element, there are certain adolescents who will stand on the court while you try to play. They will stand there, they will throw things, they will say terrible things, they will take your ball and make it absolutely impossible to go on. Eventually you are so angry, you just give up."

At first glance, this is simply a case of good and reasonable adult being harassed by bad kids. All the right seems to be, at first, on one side. But then questions occur. Was the site of the tennis court a traditional place to "hang" before the courts were built? Is there a turf question involved? Would a majority of residents wholeheartedly agree that these are "bad" kids, or would there be some ambivalence? Is it part of the local folkways that people have to win respect, have to learn how to deal with situations like this situation of harassment?

No answers will be offered here to the specific case, but what it does introduce are questions of class, culture and proprietorship. Who is the neighborhood for? Who has the right of way? Who stands down for whom? At what point, on a block or in an entire area, do newcomers challenge the hegemony of those who were there before them?

This is no small consideration where politics and government in this city are concerned. Without much personal malice, young professional newcomers can make remarks about the indigenous political leadership that would seem shocking to them if they were made by whites about blacks. Quite apart from questions of competence, honesty or high-mindedness, there are almost always hints of cultural and class prejudice.

And negative feelings are reciprocated. The "liberal" young professional newcomers — particularly, perhaps, those who have arrived later, paid higher prices and expect a great deal of their adopted neighborhoods — are apt to be looked on with deep suspicion by the existing political elite. They are often seen as fickle, insatiably demanding, ungrateful, and politically undependable. These two, the indigenous leadership (some of which has migrated to the suburbs) and the new middle class, can have sharply different notions of what the city should be, and for whom.

In most communities most of the time, proprietorship never comes into question. In a small town, despite income differences and personal animosities, no one as a rule thinks to ask who the town "belongs to." Obviously it belongs to everyone who lives there. Everyone has a recognized place. When change occurs, it occurs gradually. Even eccentric behavior passes so long as it has been of long standing.

If a definable area is occupied by 95 people typed as A and 5 typed as B, there will be no question of hegemony. A's and B's both know perfectly well where dominance lies, whose values prevail, what the future will probably hold. It is when the proportion of one culture or class or race threatens the dominant population's sense of control that uncertainty rises, destabilization occurs, and readjustment is under way. When this process happens quickly over time in an urban setting, the costs can be high on both the down and the upside so far as property values are concerned. On the downside, rapid destabilization can lead to loss of housing stock and possibly an anarchic social situation; on the upside, loss of affordable stock for lower income residents, along with their sense of community.

And here the presence of young professionals on the urban scene provides some excellent matter for thought. Because they tend to be less race sensitive (or at least negatively so) than many native residents, they help to demonstrate that race is not necessarily the key issue that has to be attended to in the dynamics of neighborhood change. Because their presence raises property values rather than lowering them, they are a proof that transition — with respect to value — need not be one-directional. And finally, because as they cluster they will invariably begin to impose their culture — however benign and constructive it seems to them — they should remind everyone that the tendency for affinity groups to want to establish themselves, to create a congenial environment for themselves, and if possible to dominate their surroundings is prodigious.

A white professional household and a black professional household may be happy to have each other next door — may, in fact, feel that having each other next door is a big step toward racial harmony. Both households, on the other hand, may be very unhappy about the presence of dubious lower class households and especially adolescent members of such households in their vicinity. This is simply to say that people appear to have an incorrigible desire to live with others sufficiently like them (and the range of tolerance varies) to contribute to feelings of stability and well-being.

There are tensions even where race and income and ostensible class are not at issue. The young New Yorker now settled in Dorchester comments, with a little bitterness, that one of the first things he encountered in Boston was the prejudice against people born elsewhere, anywhere else. "Professionally I feel it. As soon as they find out you aren't from Boston, that's it so far as a lot of people are concerned. They aren't interested anymore. You're a non-person."

This, however, is social selection at a rather fine remove. Let us take instead a composite case which attempts to describe the dynamic of change that young professional newcomers can introduce into an older urban neighborhood.

A Model

A "pioneer" — so far in the vanguard that "lifestyle" editors are unaware of him — restores an old building in an area of rooming houses and bars, with a street population frequently alcoholic. Nearby, little ethnic enclaves look out for themselves, ignored by the world.

As long as he is not personally threatened, the "pioneer" may well enjoy his architectural treasure, quite oblivious to the surroundings. Since a lower class culture utterly dominates, he probably will not even think of asking for help from public officials, and he may even rather like the "gaminess" of his new environment.

Those who follow him, the "early settlers," will pay a bit more for the homes they set out to rehabilitate. They will also be somewhat more aware of negative features in their surroundings and feel the need (in order to protect their investment) of establishing a middle class foothold. Because their eagerness to see stable adjacent households is so great, they may be quite happy to have an ethnic family across the street put money into a dilapidated building — even if this means aluminum awnings and asphalt siding.

A still later wave of upper middle class migrants, now paying substantial prices for run-down housing (as speculation has increased), may have their rehab work done for them. They will also tend to be very demanding of improved public services and may well complain about "inauthentic" restoration. (In fact at this point they may call for historic district designation.) While their immediate predecessors, the "early settlers," who may now be gone, will have realized a major appreciation on investment, these "late comers" will be more prone to worry about the future of the neighborhood and about resale. Nevertheless, if the progression continues, the house across the street may go to a more "acceptable" purchaser who will remove the aluminum awnings, strip off the asphalt siding and convert the building into a home for himself, along with two expensive apartments for young singles.

Over a period of a few years, real property will have trebled or quadrupled or more in value. In the course of this evolution, a taste for heterogeneity will shift toward a new homogeneity — even though the spice of urban life, such as the little Lebanese grocery on the corner, will still be cited as one of the great attractions.

And what about the new residents? A "liberal" young professional may feel that he is an inoffessive positive addition, or he may be an advocate and activist who gets involved in "issues" and even deplores late arrivals "who are changing the character of the neighborhood." His more "conservative" young professional counterpart hasn't so much social conscience. There are people less well-off, with different cultures and habits, whom he detests as much as they are apt to detest him. No matter. The more affluent the area becomes, the happier he will be. To take a Parkman participant's remark out of context, he would be "delighted to have someone like me move in next door to me."

In the long run, these differences of personality and philosophy may not be of much relevance, or may even be historical functions of the settlement process itself. What will matter is numbers — the number of newcomers to the existing population and their influence on housing values and costs.

The scenario above is only one of several possible scenarios, but it is indicative of the key issue. A growing young professional population, no more nor less than any other, will, over time, seek to assert itself; and if circumstances concentrate demand, it will tend to squeeze out those who cannot keep up financially or who do not "fit in." In a sense, this kind of middle class recolonization represents a Looking Glass version of what happens when poor minorities filter rapidly into weakened working class communities.

From a social policy point of view, enhanced value is a benefit to a neighborhood; but greatly enhanced value, from the same perspective, may be a diminished benefit. The unquantifiable costs include dislocation and a ripple resettlement effect which may undercut social stability and property values elsewhere. This was one of the externalities of urban renewal which should not be forgotten.

The Future

No one who has looked into the young professional phenomenon can help but notice that public policies and public sector activity have had relatively little to do with it. While redevelopment has been a factor in some cases, in many others settlement has occurred in areas untouched by urban renewal. This would suggest that fairly powerful forces are at work. Furthermore, these forces may be only marginally susceptible to conscious public action, whatever its social goals.

With that said — and before recommending some modest policy initiatives — one can suggest things to think about and look for.

First of all, while cities vary in their appeal to a young professional clientele, it would be a mistake to assume that each city has a finite pool of potential young professional migrants to draw on. While middle class resettlement in cities may or may not become a significant force in the urban equation, it is in theory quite possible that a middle class taste for city living could become an appetite that grows by what it feeds on. The more popular such a movement, the broader its potential base; the broader the base, the more likelihood of changed conditions (reduced crime, improved public education, enhanced civic amenity) which would further tend to enlarge the migrant pool. (This is at least true until the number of household formations falls off in the next decade.) The sharpest observation one can make is that the migrants at issue occupy self-appointed places in a settlement cycle, the more numerous and often more affluent arriving only after a beachhead has been secured.

The frontier rather than the war zone is perhaps a better analogy. Or the world of fashion. Pioneers, trendsetters are followed by colonists, by consumers who have been educated through the example of others about what is desirable. If a settlement "takes," it will invariably be because of the presence of "followers" who make up the bulk of demand for any commodity or fashion, whether it happens to be Victorian mini-mansions or flared trousers or whatever else. However, these trends in living choices do not advertise themselves until a late stage. The critical period has typically occurred when planners and policy makers were hardly watching, or unaware of what to watch for. Once again there is a parallel to the subtle early processes of decay.

One among the trends to follow just now might be a growing popularity of a city home with a second home far out in the country. This living arrangement, which leaps the suburbs altogether and radically alters the role of the automobile, could make eminent sense if energy costs continue to escalate. Even at the present time, one can find many working couples who will argue the logic of the nearby weekday work place, with weekend access to an "unspoiled" environment. It is a formula quite familiar to Europeans.

Other trends which now have become matters of national interest are marital and child bearing patterns. In the last year or so, absolute population decline has become less ominous to city officials as they have been taught to think in terms of households. "Fewer people, more households," appears potentially a message of good news — *if* those households are so-called "net-payers," which is to say residents affluent enough to contribute more than they require in services. One cannot generalize for all older American cities; yet as marriages grow shorter, as mate-catching becomes a cycle of middle age as well as young adulthood, as children are fewer and providing for them easier, a central living location might enjoy new appeal to some "net-payers" who before would automatically have settled in the suburbs. This is not guaranteed by any means; but as one young professional put it, "When you think of it, everybody who is not part of a conventional nuclear family — and we are seeing fewer and fewer of them — becomes a possible candidate for city living."

A phenomenon observable in a number of cities right now is the middle class reclamation of certain neighborhoods or sub-neighborhoods, favored because of architecture or location, and the simultaneous erosion around them of less desirable stock. In one case, housing will be treated as a precious durable good (more precious because of its age); in the other, as a consumable. Where housing is treated as a consumable (by exploitative landlords, abusive tenants or incapable owner-occupants), the helpless poor will inevitably have to migrate along paths of weakening demand, leaving behind cleared areas which may become ripe for future upper income development in proximity to islands of preserved older housing.

It is perfectly possible to imagine that this process, in some cases, will march urban development time briefly backward, removing from the landscape cheaper stock that grew up in the wake of more substantial housing constructed in the middle or late 19th century. It is also not only imaginable but in some cases now evident that where housing is cleared by abandonment, arson and demolition and as its previous occupants flow into areas of rapidly declining status or social cohesion, today's central city problems can be carried into the inner ring of suburbs.

Should a central city retain its strengths as an economic, cultural and transportation core (and not all of them will), large cleared zones combined with islands and archipelagoes of middle class resettlement could set the stage for a shift in the way this country locates its more intractable social problems.

Generalization, once again, is impossible. Cities vary a great deal in their residual advantages. Furthermore, energy costs, the cost of new construction, transportation policy, federally influenced financing arrangements for home ownership are all problematic factors, as are federal policies toward the least advantaged.

All these things make prediction hazardous. That some American cities may be socially reorganized on European lines is no more than a speculation. Nevertheless, negative trends which seemed quite inevitable as little as five years ago now have, for some core areas, gone into remission. The presence of a growing young professional class is both a small sign and cause of this watershed.

Middle class resettlement can be a very encouraging or alarming development, depending on one's point of view. It can be seen as a potential good in terms of stabilizing the tax base, preserving housing stock, improving public institutions, amenity and decorum. It can equally be seen — in a period of tighter and tighter housing markets — as intensifying the housing problems of the poor and squeezing even moderate income residents who may find themselves, in the end, dispossessed by affluence rather than blight.

The pattern in this country — it is seldom stated as baldly as it needs to be — is that the more well-to-do and influential have first choice and that all the rest, down the ladder of prosperity and status, in general have access to less, according to their degree. If significant numbers of the middle class decide, for whatever reasons, that a core area living situation is desirable, poorer people will be displaced, short of very concerted moves to make provision for them where they are. And some would argue that institutionalizing cities as reservations for the poor would be a final irony for urban centers which may now at last be enjoying spontaneous regeneration. Helping people and helping places, they will point out, are sometimes quite different objectives.

Nevertheless, and assuming that middle class resettlement has reached consequential proportions in some cities, it might be timely to ask what measures, if any, can be taken to cushion the less desirable effects of "urban chic."

Marketing City Options

One might begin with an ideal. The role one would ideally like to see young professionals playing is that of an evenly dispersed leaven of energy and money into neighborhoods of spongy demand and flagging self-confidence. This is obviously unrealistic. No matter what new tastes emerge, young professionals, like any other population segment, will never be drawn to more than a limited set of housing types or kinds of neighborhoods at any point in time. Furthermore, the rule of affinity makes it plain that a significant young professional presence will mean clustering.

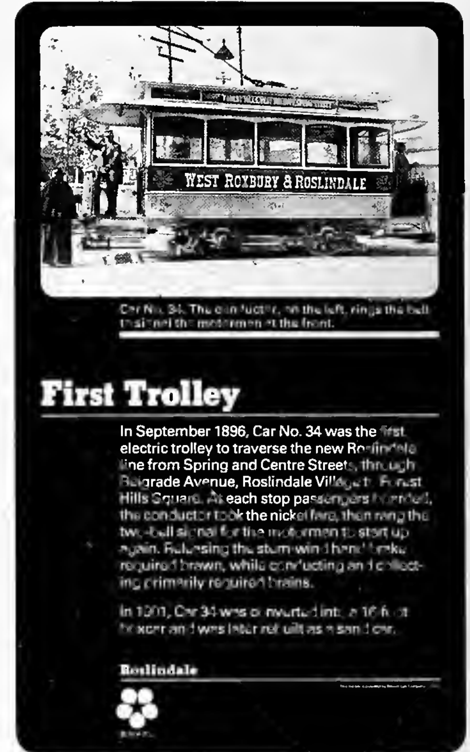
A question, then, is how to keep the tendency to cluster from resulting in a severe inflation of housing prices and costs and a consequent dislocation of responsible residents who want to stay in their neighborhoods. Relatively poorer people can fare badly in an area "discovered" by young professionals. Self-sustaining as they might otherwise be and valuable as they may be in a city's social mosaic, they may well be expelled by forces over which they have no control.

If provision is to be made for them, it must be made at an early point. A population particularly deserving of attention are renters who could, with the proper incentives and aid, become solid homeowners. This has been the approach energetically followed by the Neighborhood Housing Services program in Baltimore.

The key policy considerations are two: rooting willing and capable existing residents *before* new social and economic forces overwhelm them, while mitigating (so far as that may be feasible) the "gold rush" effect where speculation can become rampant.

A little tried strategy would be a marketing effort designed to siphon escalating demand into plausibly saleable areas where fresh demand is needed. The product — neighborhood housing resources — and the potential client group need to be analyzed, along with the modes of communication most effective in reaching them. In the Boston instance, so simple a thing as house tours organized by neighborhood associations have been an inexpensive and effective way of creating "awareness."

Some neighborhood associations, tired of the "fight or flight" set of reflexes and feeling badly served by real estate brokers, have established informal house banks (listings of available properties). These could well be supported with public aid in the form of informational materials. Where an urban-suburban real estate referral network has broken down, the public sector may have a catalytic role to play, as it may have in the behavior of lending institutions. (The Reinvestment Task Force in Seattle is an example.) Public service television represents another potential resource which the public



sector might help to direct toward the rediscovery of a variety of city options — thus countering some of the devastating impact of routine media coverage of "urban calamities." Whatever the precise arrangements, improved public sector-private sector relationships are critical.

If a young professional market exists — and it may not for all cities — a goal would be to stay a step ahead of demand. One would like to see dispersed nodes of new middle class settlement, rather than a few "golden ghettoes." At the best, such nodes could buffer change for adjacent communities and create a more favorable climate than one might otherwise hope for in terms of a degree of orderly racial integration, where the class factor soothes rather than exacerbates transition.

Above all, it is in the interests of policy makers to attune themselves to demographic and lifestyle shifts in regional and metropolitan markets. Households considered rare or freakish a few years ago may well represent new home-buying potential, ready to respond to fresh incentives. Boston has become aware, for instance, of young singles quite willing and able to take on large old houses. Novel kinds of encouragement may guide their choices and thus help to shore up weak markets.

Free from concerns about educating children, homosexuals might similarly be thought about with a new seriousness as a segment of the home buying public. And given the number of young families earnestly interested in communal life on something better than the terms of post-adolescent communes, an interesting possibility is that of small group settlements in adjacent dwellings.

These are speculations, not fantasies. From a city's point of view, even marginally increased demand on a street or in a block may significantly increase the confidence of existing residents, if the newcomers are at all compatible. This will happen and is happening spontaneously here and there. Some of the most positive developments, on a small area basis, are occuring without help from or even the awareness of public officials and agencies. A libertarian might cite this as evidence that the best hope exists where government is least; but less pessimistically, cities — at least some cities — have new possibilities to consider at a time when the funds available for conventional kinds of neighborhood improvement have diminished, and at a time when faith in conventional neighborhood investment strategies is rather on the wane.

Summary

Boston has attracted and continues to attract numbers of "young professional" home buyers. They are to be found not only in the "city chic" areas of Charlestown, the Waterfront and the South End, but now also increasingly in neighborhoods such as Dorchester and Jamaica Plain, where houses continue to sell at comparatively modest prices.

At the present time, young professional home buyers appear to be attracted chiefly by the kind and quality of housing available in the city, with the Victorian mansion or mini-Victorian "cottage" enjoying new status. In fact, there appears to be a newly emerging taste for a semi-suburban environment *within* the city.

Other attractions are affordability, location, a sense of community and the phenomenon of urban chic itself. A mix of people in the area is also often mentioned as a desirable feature. An ideological commitment to the city is of some importance, but much secondary to personal goals and probably also less a factor than among young professional newcomers of a few years ago.

Negative influences on this group's longer term decisions are crime, the adequacy and responsiveness of public institutions, particularly the schools, and less specific elements which can be characterized as the "civility" of the urban environment and uncertainty about the future. There are both similarities and striking dissimilarities in the way young professionals view these concerns as opposed to blue-collar residents, with racial attitudes a key variable.

Young professionals who choose the city tend to be trend-setters and therefore are apt to be quite migratory as they seek the good life. They are also mobile because income and relatively large experience of options encourages mobility. Even at the height of enthusiasm for a new urban home, therefore, young professionals tend to have made choices which are highly contingent on job opportunities, on marital and other living situations, and on tastes which can alter fairly suddenly. In this they are distinguished from the mass of the population more in degree than kind.

Great mobility makes young professional settlers in older urban areas a problematic population group in terms of neighborhood development, despite the fact that they can contribute valuable doses of optimism, energy, rehabilitation investment and enhanced property value in sections which may need all these things quite badly. It may be more appropriate to think of them, individually, as transients with a few years to invest than as "permanent" residents. This approach to young professionals will call more general attention to the replacement process in neighborhood housing markets — a process too little observed or understood at the present time.

Other factors deserving attention are the social and economic strains which young professionals can introduce, particularly when limited geographic areas or kinds of housing stock become too chic too quickly.

It has frequently happened that the first comers among this group ("the pioneers") value heterogeneity, accepting the existing environment much as it is. But as colonization takes place and as property values rise due to a new middle class presence, subsequent young professional migrants become more conscious of their surroundings and the effect those surroundings may have on resale possibilities. They will similarly be more class conscious than their predecessors. They may well, therefore, exert considerable pressure for conformity based on a new middle class homogeneity (the "suburbanization" of the city). Late comers still may be racially quite tolerant but will tend to be increasingly intolerant of "undesirable" lower class lifestyles.

From a public policy point of view, therefore, a young professional in-migration is a plus, but by no means an uncomplicated plus, for the city; and a campaign to attract this group deserves some careful thinking through.

Young professional complaints about public services and the quality of such institutions as schools ought to be heard and earnestly responded to, since inadequate services and institutions may silently be undermining the confidence of the existing (and perhaps less vocal) population. This "gadfly" role can be an irritant to officialdom, but such gadflies are ignored at a certain peril. If the gadflies drift away, an erosion of confidence in an existing community may continue to an end-game situation; if the gadflies colonize, new political forces may develop around themes of dissatisfaction.

One approach which the existence of young professional buyers does recommend is a marketing role for city government. Through marketing activities (marketing as opposed to simple advertising), local government could attempt to channel interest away from areas of skyrocketing demand and into areas in need of more buyers. While there are obvious risks and limitations here, this relatively untried approach could help to minimize the "Georgetown" or "Gold Coast" effect on one hand, while infusing precious new blood and money into "forgotten" areas with plausible housing options on the other.

In both instances, primary attention would remain where it properly belongs: on the existing population, its collective economic and social strength, and on its confidence in the future. While dense young professional enclaves may in the majority of cases be inevitable, while they may in a few cases be desirable, it is a diffusion of the strengths young professionals bring with them that policy makers ought to look for.

More generally, a marketing component in an overall neighborhood strategy would address an often ignored issue for city governments: the competitive position of city neighborhoods in the larger metropolitan housing market picture. Public officials can be among the least sensitive in this regard. Problem and crisis-oriented, they sometimes lose track of what city neighborhoods may have to offer and to whom.

While no one can predict with assurance the extent of a young professional migration to older urban neighborhoods, let alone the possibility of a more broadly based middle class resettlement, there are at least signs now, in some cities, that significant shifts may be underway. Such shifts could, over time, considerably rearrange the social composition of the city, with the options of the poor increasingly narrowed. This will lead to a vehement debate between those whose chief concern is helping to preserve the city as a physically, socially and economically viable place and those whose chief concern is the plight of the poor.

As the debate intensifies, one might look at its remarkable context. A conjunction of trends is at work. Among the most powerful is the surge of home-seekers now in the market as the baby boom generation comes to full maturity. This factor, along with a number of others, suggest that certain older urban centers have a better chance to reinvigorate themselves than they have had for thirty years or more. While "now or never" may be too dramatic a way to put it, the period of greatest opportunity appears to lie in the years immediately ahead.

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